

ATTRITION—USING GRANT'S METHOD AGAINST THE KAISER

Allies Predicate Victory
on Exhaustion of Men
for Teuton Armies.

By FRANK H. SIMONDS,
Author of "The Great War."

In recent months nothing has been more familiar than the assertion that German defeat would ultimately be achieved, not by victory on the battlefield, but by attrition, by the exhaustion of the manhood of Germany. Thus, in the Great War there has been revived the principle that lay behind Grant's later Civil War campaigns and was by him successfully employed to destroy the Confederacy. Every American at all acquainted with Civil War history recalls Lee's own phrase, describing his Richmond campaign, that his line was stretched so thin it ultimately broke. The expectation of the Allies is that in months, within six months now, the same fate will overtake the German lines in France and Russia, unless they are shortened, and shortening will be the confession of defeat.

The Basis of Reasoning.

The arguments that supply the basis for this reasoning may be set forth without attempting to defend or justify them; they are naturally warmly contested by the Germans, and proof of the wholly satisfactory sort must remain lacking for some time yet. What I desire to do here is to set them down, as they are the foundation for the unmistakable expectation in all Allied capitals that the war is approaching a turn and that German defeat is no longer a matter of doubt.

The starting point must be the comparison of the populations of the opposing nations. Experience has justified the conclusion now generally accepted that nations which employ the national conscription system can place in the field in their active armies and its reserves approximately one-tenth of their population. France, with 40,000,000 of people, could thus supply 4,000,000; Germany, with 67,500,000, 6,750,000; Austria, with 50,000,000, 5,000,000. Italy, on the same basis, could furnish 3,500,000, and Russia upwards of 17,000,000. Great Britain, on her side, not yet having resorted to conscription, would be limited to the force which she could raise by volunteer methods, and this has so far amounted to upwards of 8,000,000, including her original regular establishment.

It will be clear, then, that the opponents of Austria and Germany have an enormous advantage in available resources of men. In the calculations which follow no account is taken of Belgium, Serbia or the British and French colonies on the one hand, or of Turkey and Bulgaria on the other. On the whole they may fairly be said to balance and cannot affect the main problem. Roughly speaking, the wealth of men of the Allies may be represented as about 27,500,000 against 11,750,000 for the Austro-Germans. In all those nations which use conscription the number of men who could be used is higher than one-tenth of the population, but many of these are necessarily kept at work at tasks essential to the life of the nation or to the maintenance of the army, aside from actual military work.

Given this situation as to numbers, it was plain to all that the Austro-German success, if it were to be complete, must be the result of early victory, before the numbers of the opponents began to tell. The German campaigns, first against France and then against Russia, were patently attempts to dispose of one of the several enemies and force it to make a separate peace, which would bring the numbers on the two sides more nearly to parity. Superior preparation, greater celerity in operations, a central position, giving better opportunity for concentration, all contributed to make such an Austro-German success possible, and, in fact, it was almost won, first at the Marne and second about Vilna.

Allied Strategy.

For the Allies the only chance of success lay in holding Germany back and preventing an early decision, thus allowing the tardier but numerically stronger alliance to equip and organize armies and use its advantage.

But it is essential to remember that neither side could use at once all or half of its numbers. Neither France nor Germany, the best prepared nations, put into the field more than half their available resources. Russia probably never had over 2,000,000 in the field at any time; the same is true of Austria, and Great Britain has just brought its Western army to 1,000,000. Italy contented herself with maintaining her army at 750,

000. Thus, during the whole of the first year after the mobilization and organization were complete, the armies of the nations using the conscript system remained at about the same point, which marked the maximum that it was possible to equip, supply and officer. For the rest the casualties were made good by drawing upon the reserves.

But it was always clear that the alliance possessing the smaller number of reserves would first exhaust them. This was the Austro-German alliance, and the time has arrived when the Allies' military experts agree that both Germany and Austria have reached or are approaching the point where their reserves will be entirely used up and their casualties will result in the steady diminution of their field armies. What I purpose to do now is to show in the case of Germany how this theory works out, and what will be the situation next spring if the reasoning is correct.

German Losses.

Some months ago the French General Staff publicly asserted that the net German losses a month, that is, the number of men permanently eliminated by death, capture or serious wounds, together with those rendered unfit by illness, amounted to 250,000. On November 1, if this calculation were correct, Germany would thus have lost 3,750,000 out of 6,750,000. She would then have had left 3,000,000, or something less than the number which, it is generally believed, has been the average figure for her active army during the war.

The French estimate was based on a variety of things, including the experience of the French army, the reports of spies, the German official reports as posted, and

a multitude of other facts and half facts. To this estimate the French military authorities still adhere, and this explains the belief in France that German numbers have actually begun to fail.

Some time later the British produced an estimate, based on their own experience, supplemented by the information gathered by their information sources from the Germans in front of them. British experts assert that their own experience demonstrates that a field army loses 10 per cent gross and 6 per cent net a month. This is, of course, the conclusion drawn from experience in the present war, primarily. On this basis the German permanent loss on November 1 would have amounted to 3,000,000, and there would have been left some 3,750,000 available, or at least a quarter of a million more men than the German army is believed to have contained at any time. Thus, the actual decline in numbers of the German army, according to these British figures, will not begin before December.

Finally, the German official statement, showing the Prussian losses for the first twelve months, was 1,920,000, and Prussia has three-fourths of the German population; that is, with the smaller states, who report through Prussian lists. With the losses of Saxony, Bavaria, Wurttemberg and Baden, which report separately, the German loss would be 2,400,000; but this is the gross, not the net or permanent loss. On the other hand, no report is made of the losses through disability other than by wound. British experts have calculated that this about balances the gain by the return of the wounded, which would make a loss through disability of about 2 per cent monthly, not a high figure, considering the strain of the campaign and the inferiority of material, for the armies of

the conscript nations are not picked men. Accepting this British calculation, which is wholly reasonable, the British estimate would be corroborated.

I call attention, in passing, to the recent comment of "The New York Evening Post" correspondent, who, writing under a Berlin date, but obviously after having left Germany, reported that he had studied the official lists for the week ending October 1 and these showed a total of 62,000. On this basis the loss for a year would be 3,225,000, and for fifteen months 4,000,000 gross or 2,400,000 net, again with no allowance for disabilities from illness. Here, again, is slight but interesting corroboration for the British estimate.

Next Year.

We have seen that if the French estimate is correct, the decline in German numbers has already begun. Taking the British estimate, Germany will now have 3,750,000, less a number which must be allowed for those who will ultimately recover and be available, but at any fixed time prior to that will not be available. Thus, when the war ends, Germany will have several hundred thousand men, who a few months later would be available, but must otherwise count as a permanent loss. Allowing 350,000 for these, which is an arbitrary figure, Germany had on November 1 3,400,000 men available. Allowing a net loss of 6 per cent a month, she will have on January 1 about 2,800,000, and on April 1 2,300,000, or a number one-third smaller than the average size of her armies in the first year. Of course, if the French figures are taken, her army will be very much smaller.

French Losses.

Now, on the same basis, what have the French losses been? France has averaged

2,000,000 in the field since the war began, rather less than more. By November 1 her permanent loss had been 1,800,000, and allowing for the wounded who would ultimately be available, but not at a fixed time, precisely as in the German case, she would have 2,000,000 available. Her decline, then, has set in; henceforth her army will lose actually because her reserves are exhausted. On January 1 she will have 1,800,000, applying the British rule. On April 1 the number will be 1,550,000.

But the French army will still have by its side in the West 1,000,000 British, because the British had on November 1 not less than 2,600,000 troops available, and this would enable them to maintain an army of 1,000,000 in the West and 500,000 in the East or at home, and supply all casualties. The Anglo-French force in the West would thus be on April 1, when the spring campaign might be expected to begin, over 2,500,000, or more than the whole German force left in existence.

As to Austria, the estimates are various and highly involved. In the opening days of the war Austrian armies were routed and vast captures made. At Przemyśl over 120,000 were taken. Austria has lost since the war began upward of 1,000,000 prisoners. Her loss in the first year has been generally fixed at not less than 3,000,000, leaving her 2,000,000 available. On November 1 this number would be 1,650,000; on April 1, 1,200,000. Thus, in the spring Austria and Germany would together dispose of 3,500,000, accepting the British estimate; according to the French it would be little more than 2,000,000.

Russia.

In the case of Russia casualties are of less moment. Having at least 17,000,000 men, Russia used in the first year some

5,000,000, and lost, perhaps, 3,500,000. Since then she has lost, perhaps, 750,000; but her problem is not to find men, but equipment. Thus her army may fall to 1,000,000 in times of defeat and disaster, but next spring she will have at least 2,000,000 again, which is about the size that her field armies are fixed at on a war footing.

As to Italy, the situation is quite the same. Italy has only put an army of 750,000 in the field, and she can keep it at this figure for several years, having a reservoir of 3,500,000. Combined, Russia and Italy should have 2,750,000 men on April 1, and behind them very great reserves. This is to be set against the Austrian strength of 1,200,000 and no reserves, just as the German 2,300,000 may be set against the Anglo-French forces of 2,550,000, behind which are considerable British reserves, both of troops already in hand and prospective enlistments.

We have, then, according to this estimate for April 1, 5,250,000 for the Quadruple Alliance and 3,500,000 for the Dual. In addition Russia and Italy will have several millions of reserves each and Great Britain at least one.

The Butcher's Bill.

On April 1, accepting the conservative British estimate, Germany will have lost 5,450,000 in killed, captured and permanently disabled; France, 2,450,000; Austria, 3,800,000. Russia's losses will not be less than 6,000,000; Great Britain's will pass 1,250,000; Italy's will be close to 750,000. But the essential fact to recognize is that the weaker alliance, so far as numbers are concerned, will then be hopelessly outnumbered in the field and destitute of reserves, while the opposing alliance will have both larger field armies

and very considerable reserves still available. Such troops as the Austro-Germans then have will in the opinion of the Allied experts be wholly insufficient, not merely to take the offensive, but to hold the long fronts both in the East, the West and South, which will include both the Italian front and the Balkans. By this time the Allies are certain that the retreat from Poland or Belgium will be inevitable, and the first sign of German retreat will be accepted as proof of German defeat.

Expect by Next Spring
They Will Outnumber
Germany and Austria.

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All Allied military authorities expect to see the war ended by German exhaustion in men by the approach of next autumn and possibly by midsummer. They find additional support for their faith in the growing difficulties of the German food situation. There are considerable differences between French and British estimates of German losses; there is no difference, save in time, as to the actual exhaustion of German man power next year.

German Arguments.

I have set forth the Allied case as it has been made in many magazines and newspapers in France, Great Britain and Russia. I confess to having found no German answer which meets the situation and disposes of the arguments which are the foundation for the belief that Germany will be conquered by attrition. But I should make it clear that not all Allied observers accept these arguments, and they are rejected in totality by all German writers and sympathizers.

German experts insist that Germany can put far more than one-tenth of her male population in the field, and point to figures showing at least 9,000,000 available. But this includes those employed in munition works, on the railroads and in other trades which must go on if the nation and the army are to live. If you grant that more Germans are available, then necessarily more French, Russians and Italians are available, and you merely postpone the inevitable.

Again, Germans argue that the Allies are at the end of their resources in money and that France and Russia are about ready to make peace. This is an open question, but certainly it does not affect the main question, that unless Germany succeeds in getting peace soon she will be beaten by mere attrition.

As to the Balkans.

The German excursion to the Balkans does not affect the main situation. Few Turks are likely to be brought to the Western or Eastern front. We have allowed in our estimate 500,000 British troops for this Near Eastern field, together with the contributions of French and British colonies, which will be considerable, and Serbia remains with quite the same chance for guerilla warfare that Spain used so fatally against Napoleon. As for Bulgaria, her 300,000 troops do not represent one month's casualty lists of her greater allies.

Germany has not gone to the Balkans to conquer provinces, but peace, in my judgment. Had Constantinople fallen to the Allies the moral effect would have been terribly disastrous, and it would have raised Allied hopes to the point where peace would have been next to impossible on any German terms. And Constantinople would have fallen if the road to the Golden Horn had not been opened for German ammunition.

But to make her Balkan move Germany had to abandon her Russian campaign. To Serbia she sent less than 250,000, but this left her armies in Russia too weak to make progress or take the offensive, save in the Riga district. This is the best confirmation available for the French belief that German decline is already actual, in numbers. But this whole question is very fairly debatable, and I have endeavored to set forth what is at best a theory, only to be proven, if at all, by subsequent events.

As I close this article two interesting details come to hand. First, from British sources wholly trustworthy I learn that the official British estimate of the monthly permanent German wastage has been raised to 240,000, which brings it within 10,000 of the French. Secondly, Mr. Hilaire Belloc, the most interesting and best known of British military writers, in a recent article asserts that the French official figure for the maximum of German, and, for that matter, French, strength has been raised to twelve instead of ten per cent of the total population, which would make the German resources 8,000,000 and the French 4,800,000, respectively. Instead of 6,750,000 and 4,000,000. This modification is based upon the prolongation of the war into a second year, which brings a new class of conscripts into the field who were too young in 1914.

These changes do not affect the main question, except as they postpone the time when German exhaustion will become absolute. The relative strength of the opposing nations is not modified.